



## ***West Midlands Branch eNews***

***Issue 9 - May 2015***

Readers who received eNews by e-mail also received the following attachments

- Rail User Express, May 2015
  - Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth RPA (page 6) and Cotswold Line Promotion Group (page 9)
- West Midlands Rail Devolution
- Midland Metro Passenger Satisfaction
- Rail Passenger Satisfaction

*We welcome contributions from branch members, other Railfuture members, or the public, with any interesting news or pictures. So if you've learnt about something the West Midlands rail scene, or if you've been on an interesting/unusual journey, let us know and we'll include whatever we can.*

In this issue:-

Railfuture West Midlands Branch AGM - Report  
Stakeholder Meetings and Consultations  
Letters

### **BRANCH MATTERS**

#### **West Midlands Branch Annual General Meeting Report**

Our Annual General meeting was held on Saturday, April 18th in Birmingham. The branch officers elected were:-

- Chairman, William Whiting
- Vice Chairman, Albert
- Secretary, Steve Wright
- Treasurer, Ian Jackson (new officer)

The remaining committee members elected were Phil Bennion (Tamworth), Phil Davis (Birmingham), Peter Kennard (Solihull), Colin Major (Worcester), Peter Rowland (Stratford), Michael Tombs (Coventry). Mark Sullivan and Peter Hughes decided not to take a break from the committee.

No fewer than four presentations were given to the gathering after the AGM business - Richard Burden, Shadow Minister for Transport on Labour's rail policies (but now of only academic interest), Toby Rackcliff of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority on their 'Vision For Rail' (West Midlands Rail Devolution), Rachel Groves from Network Rail on phase 2 of the New Street station development and Ian Brown, Railfuture Director of Policy on Railfuture's "Manifesto".

#### **Railfuture Summer Conference 2015 - 20th June, Newark**

Don't forget this year's Summer Conference, which has some superb speakers. The Early Bird discount for members has now ended but places are still available for £30 – book online via the Railfuture website ([www.railfuture.org.uk/confereces](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/confereces) or click on 'events' menu item then 'conferences'). There are still places available for this, at £30 per person including buffet lunch. The overall theme of the conference is "Enhancing capacity in the East Midlands". Speakers are:

- David Horne - Virgin Trains East Coast
- Andy Castledine - Stagecoach Rail;
- Graham Botham - Network Rail Principal Strategic Planner LNE & EM
- Steve Barber - Broxtowe Borough Council talking about Nottingham Trams
- Roger Blaney - how the enhanced service from May on the Nottingham – Newark – Lincoln line was achieved;
- Representative from the Great Central Railway - bridging the Midland Main line.
- Speakers from East Midlands Trains and Nottinghamshire County Council may also be added.

There will be a question and answer session after each presentation and the conference fee includes a welcome drink and buffet lunch.

### **Membership**

Have you asked your friends to join Railfuture yet? If we all could get just one new member each then, across the whole country, we could get Railfuture's finances into a much healthier state. Even better if we can get some younger new members (under 60!).

## **CONSULTATIONS**

### **London Midland Trains Stakeholders Conference**

Three of the committee attended this event last month. This was an excellent stakeholders briefing where we were shown London Midland's thoughts and achievements.

- We were shown route by route data on punctuality which has improved overall in West Midlands by 20% helped by an effective autumn 2014 leaf timetable.
- LMT's Managing Director, Patrick Verwer, expanded on the Direct Award which is initially for only 15 months from April 2016 till June 2017 with a possible extension for a further 13 months. Not much time to change anything significantly. To show that the contract is "value for money" they will focus on train service performance and customer service delivery.
- The BBC in covering the Easter closure of Northampton were only concerned with what went wrong and had trouble finding negative concerns so interviewed commuters on their return to work to find comments about closing the station at a time when commuters did not travel. Indicative that the media are interested in bad news not what went well which is the case of Northampton was completed on time.
- Birmingham New Street Phase 2 is to be opened on 20 September 2015. We look forward to that!

Some of the issues raised by attendees were:

1. Severe overcrowding on the Hereford- Birmingham and Shrewsbury- Birmingham services

LMT said it has simply no spare rolling stock in its diesel fleet. (Colin Major reported that his journey from Worcester to New Street was in a three car Class 170 (23-metre cars), but the return in a two car Class 150 (20-metre cars) cramped with standing passengers shoulder to shoulder and buggies in doorways similar to rush hour on the London Underground reflecting the lack of suitable DMUs.)

## 2. Inadequate publicity for the Easter closures in and out of Euston

It appeared that passengers at Northampton were not aware of this according to a representative from the Northampton line user group. LMT said they had done everything to alert passengers of engineering works but would welcome feedback on any areas where they could give extra publicity, such as social media.

## 3. Cleaning of trains

Some trains were litter strewn and LMT recognised this is an issue needing addressing. However, litter was recycled and LMT said it had the best record of recycling rubbish. There is to a refurbishment of the interior of Class 170 units.

## 4. Earlier trains on Sundays

With more retail units opening on Sundays there is a need for employees to travel to work but no trains early enough. LMT's MD said extra carriages had been introduced and he was aware of the need for earlier services and this is something he will pursue.

(Comment from Ian Jackson: Patrick Verwer's response about Sunday trains was very encouraging and clearly indicated that this is something that we can expect as part of the Direct Award although he understandably chose his words with care.)

## 5. Train breakdowns at Snow Hill.

These create serious delays because, unlike Birmingham New Street, there is no flexibility to move a train to another platform. So, when will the fourth platform become available after completion of Midland Metro? The route manager said she is going to undertake some work on this matter as platform flexibility is an issue requiring addressing.

The set of presentations slides can be viewed at <http://www.londonmidland.com/about-us/latest-news/#/documents/london-midland-slide-presentation-to-west-midlands-stakeholders-april-2015-45328>

## **Black Country Partners Engagement Group (PEG)**

This was attended by the Railfuture West Midlands Chairman, William Whiting. It included a presentation on the plan for and progress with Sprint Bus route to Quinton and beyond. Their presentation "Black Country PEG - Sprint Buses Plan" is available on request to the West Midlands Branch Secretary.

## **SHREWSBURY/CHESTER RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION**

SCRUA are holding their Annual General and Public Meeting on Thursday 4th June 2015 at 7.15pm. It will be held in St Mary's Catholic Church Hall, Wrexham and will include guest speaker, Councillor Liam Robinson of Merseytravel.

## OTHER NEWS

Virgin Provides Extra Seats on WCML - Welcome, but.....

As part of its new West Coast Mainline franchise deal, Virgin Train's conversion of one First Class carriage in each of its nine-carriage Pendolino sets will create a net gain of 2,100 seats in Standard Class. Word on the street is that Virgin was leaned on by the Government to make these changes as a condition of contract renewal. This is good news for passengers overall, but comes with a sting in the tail.

VT Pendolino stock interiors are notoriously badly organised as a result of Virgin ignoring 150 years of railway carriage design and, arguably, the well-established preferences of passengers. Seats do not align with windows as space (and legroom) is sacrificed to pack in the (revenue-earning) seats, airline style. Comfort is sacrificed. And the too often smelly toilets are a horror story of their own.

RFWM Committee member Cllr Phil Davis, who appeared on BBC Midlands Today to give a personal view on the deal says:

'I've travelled on perfectly comfortable Pendolinos on the Italian railway but the British variety has sacrificed comfort to packing in the paying customer. This is a typical distortion in our rail funding system, which gives train operators a financial disincentive to use more carriages and kit them out with traditional 4 seat tables as standard. Standard Class on Virgin West Coast is pretty intolerable as a passenger experience, while walk-on First Class fares are eye-wateringly unaffordable. If I'm not pressed for time, at least I can choose Chiltern and enjoy the comfort of an ex-BR Mark IV - the acme of good railway design.'

## LETTERS

### **Diversionsary Route via Stratford?**

Paul Boness writes: "With reference to Michael Brockington's letter in the April West Midlands branch e-Newsletter, I would like to point out that the data collected in the recent campaign to reopen the Stratford-Long Marston-Honeybourne line is available at [www.shakespeareline.com](http://www.shakespeareline.com). I also have it on my computer and would be happy to help any interested parties."

### **Copy of a letter from a Railfuture member to the Financial Times**

Why is it that Jeremy Paxman, like practically everybody else, got hold of the wrong end of the stick concerning HS2?

He writes that we will be able to get from London to Birmingham "..... 30-odd minutes quicker. This will, apparently, make the country much more efficient". This statement is complete rubbish. The main point of HS2 is to free up capacity on the West Coast Main Line. This will allow the transfer of considerable volumes of freight from our congested and environmentally unfriendly road network onto rail, which is quicker and more efficient. This WILL make the country more efficient. The ability to travel between Birmingham and London more quickly is only an additional benefit.

Mr.Paxman is also wrong to suggest that to get from Leeds to Manchester by HS2 you would have to travel via Birmingham. Curiously, there are existing rail services between these two cities (albeit

poor and very overcrowded) but as part of the "Northern Powerhouse" there are also plans for HS3 across the Pennines.

Where I do agree with Mr.Paxman is that he has put his finger on the almost total lack of connectivity between HS2 and the existing network. The idea of having to walk (or take a tram if the line is ever built) from the new HS2 station in Birmingham to New Street Station is just bonkers. There needs to be full connectivity so that passengers can make cross-platform interchanges to regional and local trains. Some way has to be found to get HS2 trains into New Street, thus allowing through travel to places such as Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury. This lack of connectivity applies also in the East Midlands and Sheffield. HS2 needs to serve either Derby or Nottingham but not some random parkway station in between. Likewise it needs to serve Sheffield Midland (as it used to be known) and not serve a new station at Meadowhall or wherever.

The design brief for HS2 was seriously flawed, there is no doubt. If only the progenitors of the project had visited Germany to see how they run their high-speed trains he would see that almost without exception they serve the appropriate Hauptbahnhof for each city. The many high-speed lines which they have built and are building all link into the existing network. If I arrive on a high-speed train in Munich, for instance, I have immediate access at Munich Hbf to local and regional trains, the S-bahn, U-bahn and, outside the station, to the tramway network as well. Why did no-one have the wit to go and look? It's a classic case of re-inventing the wheel.

Finally, of course, we want a direct link from HS2 to HS1 so that through trains can be run to continental destinations. The UK Border Agency need to get their act together to provide on-board security, immigration and other checks.

From: Donald Payne, B.Sc., M.Soc.Sc., Tipton

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 10 in June 2015.

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